

Fort Missoula, Powder Magazine
In Fort Missoula on the north bank
of the Bitter Root River
Missoula
Missoula County
Montana

HABS No. MON-13

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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
801 19th Street, N.W.
Washington, D. C. 20006

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POWDER MAGAZINE

Fort Missoula, Missoula County, Montana

ADDRESS: Fort Missoula, Missoula, Montana
OWNER: United States Government
OCCUPANT: none
USE: Storage for National Guard ammunition

HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

The small stone building built in 1878 is one of three structures remaining that date from the early days of Fort Missoula. The fort was built in 1877 because of a threat of Indian uprising to protect the Mullan Road, an invaluable link between Fort Benton, at the head of navigation on the Missouri River, and Fort Walla Walla, Walla Walla, Washington.

Unlike many western military posts that were abandoned after the Indian threat subsided in the 1880's, Fort Missoula has had an almost continuous history of use through four wars and some 90 years time.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The gold rush in Montana that began in 1862 and the building of the Mullan Road (1858-1863) were major factors in the unrest and eventual uprising of the Indians of the northwest region. As white settlers flooded into the Bitterroot Valley, the Indians became restless. When they were ordered to leave the valley and move to the Jocko Reservation, they refused to go, and the settlers feared an uprising and asked that a fort be established. There had been trouble in the Territory with the Sioux and Nez Perce, and it was feared that the peaceful Flathead Indians might also go on the war path.

In June, 1877, Captain C. C. Rawn and two companies of men arrived in Missoula and began cutting logs and constructing the fort, but news of Chief Joseph's march eastward halted the construction. Rawn and his force of fifty men, reinforced with a hundred civilians, marched out to Lolo Canyon and hastily barricaded themselves. They intercepted Chief Joseph, who demanded free passage up the Bitterroot Valley. When the civilians realized that the Indians were not actively seeking war, they withdrew their support, and the Indians by-passed Rawn's log barricades.

Rawn then withdrew from his position (later nicknamed Fort Fizzle) and returned to Fort Missoula where he awaited reinforcements which soon arrived from Fort Benton and Fort Shaw under the command of Col. John Gibbon. Gibbon took the troops out and intercepted Chief Joseph in the Big Hole Basin on August 8, 1877. The Battle of the Big Hole took place here, but Chief Joseph and his people slipped away from the soldiers during the night and continued their flight toward Canada through the Yellowstone Park region, then north toward the border. They were overtaken at the foot of the Bear Paw mountains by troops under General Nelson A. Miles, and there Chief Joseph surrendered on September 30, 1877.

After the Big Hole Battle, the western Montana troops returned to Fort Missoula and resumed construction on the fort. Companies of the Third Infantry marched in from Corrinne, Utah (600 miles) and arrived in November to help.

In 1879, the troops at Fort Missoula were given the job of restoring the Mullan Road which had been sabotaged in numerous places by packers for mining supplies who feared the competition of stagecoaches and wagons using the Road. Logs were piled over the road, bridges had to be repaired, and long stretches of the road were washed out.

The post was abandoned in 1898, re-established in 1901, and enlarged five years later. It became a regimental post, and permanent fire-proof buildings were completed by 1910. It was abandoned again from 1912 to 1921, except as the site of a mechanic's school in World War I. Then it was again reactivated and garrisoned by two companies of the Fourth Infantry. Today the Powder Magazine and the N.C.O. Living Quarters (MON-14) remain as reminders of the early days of Fort Missoula. The Magazine is still in use, now holding ammunition for the National Guard.

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL AND SOURCES

- The Bozeman Courier, Bozeman, Montana, May 31, 1929
Burlingame, Merrill G., The Montana Frontier, State Publishing Co., Helena, Mont., 1942.
Hart, Herbert H., Old Forts of the Northwest, Superior Publishing Co., Seattle, Wash., 1963.
Leeson, M. A., History of Montana, 1739-1885, Warner, Beers & Co., Chicago, 1885.
Mattison, Ray H., The Army Posts of the Northern Plains, 1865-1885, Oregon Trail Museum Assn., Nebraska, 1954.
The Missoulian, Missoula, Montana, May 23, 1965.
Montana, A State Guide Book, Federal Writers Project, W.P.A., Viking Press, New York, 1939.

AUTHORITIES CONSULTED

Brig. Gen. W. M. Johnson (U.S.A. retired), Missoula, Mont., an officer stationed at Fort Missoula between the two World Wars.

ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

EXTERIOR

Overall Dimensions - 17'-8 3/4" x 19'-11".

Foundation - stone.

Wall Construction - two foot thick native stone, rubble construction.

Openings - one exterior door 2'-6" x 6'10 1/2" constructed of 2" x 7 1/2" T & C boards having a sheet metal covering located on the north facade. Three vent holes, the largest 6" x 6 3/4" ventilate the west side, and two such vents are on the east side.

Roof - wood shingles, not original. A recent metal vent stack crowns the simple gable roof, pitch approximately 31°.

INTERIOR

Floor Plan - a one room structure with a width of 13'-10" and a length of 15'-9". Ceiling height is 8'-6".

Flooring - T & G pine.

Wall and Ceiling Finish - walls are exposed stone. Ceiling of logs (21 in all) approximately 9" in diameter. On top of the logs is a dirt fill approximately 1 1/2' deep. Rumors have it that old rifles and other artifacts may be buried in this fill.

GENERAL SETTING

The building is located in the southwest corner of the fort adjacent to the Bitterroot River.

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